

Appropriations Committee

Testimony on H.B. 6659 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 and Making Appropriations Therefor

Good morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and other esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Win Evarts and I live in Norwalk with my wife and 32-year-old-son with an intellectual disability. I'm the Executive Director of the Arc of Connecticut, Inc., our state's largest advocacy organization dedicated to protecting the rights of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and promoting opportunities for their full inclusion in the lives of their community.

I'm testifying today on H.B. 6659, the Governor's Budget, and I'm asking you to continue to invest in the future of nonprofit community-based organizations that provide the bulk of safety net services and supports to individuals that need them so that they can move forward with their lives. Specifically, I'm asking you to increase the state's commitment to nonprofit providers of health and human services by 9% in fiscal 2024 and 7% in fiscal 2025 to account for the high inflation that has impacted providers over the past two years.

The increases that the legislature provided in the last biennium were greatly appreciated but not all parts of the safety net were treated the same way: providers of services to individuals with IDD did not receive Cost of Living Adjustments like the rest of the human services system. Instead, they received funds in line with a union settlement that wonderfully increased the minimum wage in the sector, but only provided two 3% raises for anyone above minimum wage and no funding for increasing non-compensation costs which have risen dramatically. This resulted in wage compression which has further exacerbated the ongoing workforce crisis which has staff vacancy rates currently in an estimated range of 20 to over 30 percent.

On June 1, 2023, the minimum wage will increase from \$14.00/hr. to \$15/hr., and the premium of the implemented minimum wage for providers supporting individuals with IDD will drop from 25% to 16.7%. In short, without directly addressing the workforce crisis and the significant inflation that has occurred, providers will be unable to increase programming of existing services or launch new services for new clients due to fear of financial losses. A lack of action, as proposed in the Governor's budget, will have negative repercussions beyond a flat-lined budget with more labor flight and more program diversions and suspensions being some potential outcomes.

Please support increasing funding for all community health and human service nonprofits by 9% in FY24 and 7% in FY25. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Governor's Budget.

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